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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 000328

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [AF](#) [EG](#) [AE](#) [XF](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON FOREIGN MINISTER
RASSOUL

Classified By: D/Ambassador Francis J. Ricciardone; Reasons (b) and (d)
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[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: In the Ambassador's meeting with new Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul on January 23, they concurred that the London Conference will serve as a symbol of a new start for Afghanistan and deliberated how to further emphasize reintegration and reconciliation. Rassoul confirmed President Karzai's keen interest in meeting with Secretary Clinton and believed that a January 27 joint dinner meeting would work. They also discussed the need for international cooperation in preparation for Afghanistan's Parliamentary elections, now postponed until September 18, candidates in the running to replace SRSG Kai Eide, and the best means to gain more traction on the Afghan-Pakistani Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA). Rassoul also shared his future plans for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and requested additional support. End Summary.

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London Conference will Symbolize a New Start
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[¶2.](#) (C) In the Ambassador's courtesy call on Foreign Minister Rassoul, the agreed that the London Conference will serve as a symbol of a new start and hope for Afghanistan. Rassoul confirmed that President Karzai intended to emphasize the Afghanization of the effort by building up its security forces, making progress on reintegration and reconciliation, and showing a serious commitment to fighting corruption through good governance. Rassoul was confident the Conference will help overcome "the difficult period of the past". Ambassador Eikenberry concurred, noting that the Conference will showpiece a new-found confidence, reaffirm international support for the Afghan government, emphasize Afghan sovereignty, and lay the groundwork for the Kabul Conference.

[¶3.](#) (C) The Ambassador suggested that, in addition to Karzai's reported plan to recognize Japan in his London speech for its recent generous USD five billion commitment to Afghanistan, it would be most helpful if Karzai were to acknowledge the United States' unprecedented contributions to Afghanistan. The U.S contribution to Afghanistan this year, and likely next, will be its largest foreign assistance budget for any one country in history, explained the Ambassador. It would be helpful if President Karzai were to recognize the dramatic increase in U.S. civilian presence in Afghanistan. In August 2008, there were approximately 225 U.S. civilians in Afghanistan; by summer 2010 there will be over 1,000.

[¶4.](#) (C) Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs (CDDEA) Ambassador Wayne raised the need to include the GIRoA's commitment to fighting corruption in President

Karzai's London speech. Ashraf Ghani was completing the draft of Afghanistan's corruption paper for the Conference and there was suitable material to draw on. Rassoul agreed, noting that Ghani was "fine-tuning" the anti-corruption paper.

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Moving Forward on Reintegration
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¶5. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry said he understood the Secretary had raised reintegration and reconciliation in her phone conversation with Rassoul and that we understood that President Karzai would likely sign his reintegration plan before departing for London. Rassoul confirmed this intention, adding that Karzai would announce the plan in a press conference later in the day. Karzai would also mention his reintegration and reconciliation plan at the Istanbul Conference, both during the trilateral and regional meetings and in a press conference. And, Karzai would comment on the plan in Berlin on his way to the London Conference.

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Who's in the Running for SRSG?
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¶6. (C) To Rassoul's query regarding a suitable replacement for UN SRSG Kai Eide, the Ambassador replied that we have no position on a particular candidate but we should all agree before reaching a decision. Rassoul commented that of the candidates in the running, former Slovakian Foreign Minister

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Jan Kubish had called him and appeared to be a good possibility. However, he believed Turkish diplomat/former NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan Hikmet Cetin would be a very positive person for Afghanistan. Further, Cetin enjoyed Karzai's full trust. Ambassador Eikenberry noted that Cetin enjoyed the respect of the United States and he had traveled extensively with Cetin when Cetin was in NATO.

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International Cooperation Needed for Parliamentary Elections
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¶7. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry next raised the upcoming Parliamentary elections, sharing that President Karzai had told him earlier in the day that the elections would be held on September 16 (we heard later from IEC Commissioner Barakzai that the elections will be held September 18, exactly five years after the last legislative polls were held). By then ISAF and ANSF would have achieved considerable progress on the security front, which would create better conditions than those during the presidential election. This psychological boost would pose a set back to the Taliban. IEC Chief Commissioner Ludin had said he would issue a statement within the next day or two that would cite a number of reasons for the postponement, including not only funding issues, but also logistical and security concerns, as well as the need to improve the overall electoral process. The Ambassador and President Karzai had also agreed that funding for these elections should be a joint cooperative effort between Afghanistan and the international community. Karzai had also assured the Ambassador of his commitment to improve the electoral process.

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Gaining Traction on APTTA
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¶8. (C) Ambassador Eikenberry said he had heard that the Secretary's phone conversation with Rassoul had been positive and that APTTA was one of the items they had discussed. Unfortunately, Pakistani Foreign Minister Qureshi would not attend the regional conference in Turkey, but he would attend

the London Conference where APTTA could be discussed. Rassoul assured the Ambassador that the issue was a priority and he would meet with Qureshi in Pakistan soon after the London Conference. Ambassador Wayne cited two remaining issues that must be addressed to complete negotiations: 1) re-exportation of goods and 2) access over time through Wagah to India. Wayne added that an interim USAID-sponsored study on the re-export issue, which should be ready in a few months, could help address some of the outstanding concerns. The key is to gain political momentum. Ambassador Eikenberry said he had heard that some of the goods never even make it to Afghanistan, and that while Pakistan's trucking firms are profiting, many of its industrialists are upset because they stand to lose in competition with the duty-free goods re-entering Pakistan.

¶9. (C) Ambassador Wayne explained that Pakistani and Afghan private sector leaders were supposed to meet to break the impasse, but discussion had been postponed several times. Reportedly, their meeting would take place the week of February 1. The other challenge was that senior negotiators were not always available to give the necessary political emphasis. After Sharani had left the Ministry of Commerce, no senior Afghan had taken on the effort. Agreeing on a new target date in conjunction with the formation of an authoritative team to continue negotiations would help push the effort forward, suggested Wayne. Ambassador Eikenberry said he was sympathetic on the Wagah issue and suggested that a gradual increase in access would be the most realistic option; however, the Pakistanis were unwilling, so far, to cede on this point. Rassoul reiterated his determination to make the issue a top priority and raise it in London and Islamabad.

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Encouraging Outreach to the Arab World . . .
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¶10. (C) The Foreign Minister was receptive to the Ambassador's emphasis on increasing Afghan-Arab relations, an objective he had mentioned during his hearings before Parliament, statements that had also drawn criticism from the Iranians. The Ambassador suggested that the arrival of new

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UAE and Egyptian Ambassadors in Kabul in the near future would help advance this effort. Rassoul concurred, adding that he had recently met with Egypt's deputy intelligence chief and has good relations with the UAE. He also planned on meeting next week with his Kuwaiti and Qatari counterparts.

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. . . And to the Americans
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¶11. (C) In addition to approaching the Arabs, Rassoul expressed interest in traveling soon to Washington to meet with government officials and think tanks. Rassoul joked that after seven years of work in the Afghan government, he had a "PhD" in Afghanistan and would like to present a different image of his country and change perceptions in Washington. The Ambassador assured Rassoul that he was confident in the Foreign Minister's ability to explain and persuade, adding that other ministers should also make a presence in Washington.

¶12. (C) Moving on to the subject of President Karzai's plans over the next 18 months, the Ambassador suggested that, in addition to the London Conference, holding a possible Grand Peace Jirga, and hosting the Kabul Conference, we need to think of a time for Karzai to travel to Washington and meet with President Obama. Rassoul suggested that following the London conference, the two presidents hold a video conference to discuss next steps, including Karzai's visit to Washington. Ambassador Eikenberry replied that he had made

this same recommendation to Washington and hoped a video conference would be arranged shortly after London.

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Future Plans for the MFA
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¶13. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's query regarding the Foreign Minister's plans for his ministry, Rassoul mentioned he planned on establishing a Board of Advisers to improve Afghanistan's regional understanding and influence. However, the MFA lacked adequate funding to recruit suitable advisers. Rassoul asked whether the international community could assist in this effort. Ambassador Wayne explained that U.S. policy restricts direct budget support for government salaries. However, if the GIROA were to establish a policy of providing hardship or bonuses for employees, the USG might be able to support this new Afghan policy. Rassoul said he would explore this option and discuss it with the Finance Minister. He also lauded the Asia Foundation's support to the MFA and hoped it would continue, in particular its training programs (the current program expires the end of January). Ambassador Eikenberry said that in his meeting with Asia Foundation members the previous evening, he had encouraged the Foundation to continue and even increase its support of the MFA.
EIKENBERRY